

B NOYES (Geo. S.)

SERMON
Bind cover in front.

On the Death of

FATHER TAYLOR,

PREACHED IN

THE SEAMEN'S BETHEL,

APRIL 16, 1871,

By REV. GEORGE S. NOYES.



In Memoriam.

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S E R M O N.

"If a man keep my sayings, he shall never see death." — JOHN viii. 51.

TO him whose thought is shaped by the seeming, this may appear a strange saying to introduce upon such an occasion as this; and indeed, if only the revealings of Nature afford us data as we gaze upon the face of the dead, words like these were vainly spoken. Their contradiction would lie before us in the closed eye, sealed lip, and lifeless form of the dead. But the light of the blessed gospel, as declared by Him who brought life and immortality to light, has illumed earth's darkest scenes, and enabled us to pass beyond the outward semblance, and grasp the spiritual significance of this language, between which and the gloomy realization of our frailty no real contradiction exists.

Standing here to-day with a mournful consciousness of the fact that death has wrested from our grasp the visible presence of a dearly-loved pastor, friend, and father, fearless of successful controversy, we dare

present the glad assurance, as from the lips of Him who spake as never man spake, “ If a man keep my sayings, he shall never see death.”

“ *Now, surely,*” says the carping listener, “ we know that he is a base deceiver. Abraham is dead, and the prophets, and the apostles, and the martyrs; and yet he says, ‘ If a man keep my sayings, he shall never see death.’ What folly is this that he so confidently sets forth, demanding our assent thereto ?”

Fools, and slow of heart to believe ! Do ye not know that God is the God of the living, and not of the dead ? And is he not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the prophets, apostles, and martyrs ? Death is not always what it seems, though, perchance, to some it is more. If we had “ Paul’s eyes,” the mists and gloom of death and the grave would become transparent ; and through them we should see the ransomed spirit, freed of its encumbrance, gladly wing its flight to shores whose wondrous beauty and brightness would entrance the soul.

To the eye kindled by the unfading light of the true gospel hope, the grim, gaunt spectre becomes transformed, and there appears the beautiful form of a lovely maiden, whose radiant smile and soft enchanting music wooes us to a fair country, —

“ Lovelier far
Than sages tell or poets sing ;
Brighter than noonday glories are,
And softer than the tints of spring :

It is all holy and serene,—
 The land of glory and repose;
 No cloud obscures the radiant scene,
 And not a tear of sorrow flows."

There may be hesitation, perchance a seeming reluctance, as though doubtful if the sweet messenger be not, after all, a cherished delusion, a false charmer, whose enchantments may betray the trusting. But a voice truer than fancied conceptions re-assures the doubting heart, and arouses the spiritual activities to such an extent, that earth's brightness quickly fades in the light of rare visions whose celestial beauty enraptures the soul.

Death to the great apostle, but a departure towards which with fond desire he hastened, to the Christian heart is ever a glad realization, if the life-work be done.

As the long-absent voyager greets with joyous welcome the re-appearance of his native hills as homeward he flies, so the heart of the believer leaps with joy as the bright hills of glory heave into view. And why not? To the believer, what is death but a glad transfer to the beautiful and bright beyond? Wearied with toilsome journeying over rough and barren wastes, who would not gladly rest himself beneath the olive, palm, or fig tree, with friends to cheer and comfort?

The closing of a pure and true life is delightful to contemplation: is it, suppose ye, less so to realization?

Nearness of approach heightens, never dims, the beauties of heaven. Obedience to Christ disarms man's mightiest foe, and gives tranquillity of soul in the midst of the fiercest raging of the sea of life.

It may not affect the fact of death as an incident in the progress of events; but it so transposes this fact, that it is no more an object of dread, nor an occasion of fearful apprehension. He who, by keeping Christ's sayings, effects a union with the great Life-giver, finds a pathway of triumph through death and the grave.

There are lights across the river "that never grow dim," as well as "along the shore;" while the rod of divine protection and the staff of divine encouragement make the fainting heart to become strong and the timid brave. Death is death no more to such: they see it not, nor care for its approach. They know it is not for them to die. Can the healthy scion that has formed connection with the life-current of the sound tree die while this connection is perpetuated? No more can these, and for the same reason. They have become a part of the living vine, and, by keeping Christ's sayings, perpetuate the union. Persevering in this, they will die only when the vine dies.

But he is the resurrection and the life. He it is in whom believing, though one were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Him shall never die. This strange announcement finds a partial explanation in that equally significant utter-

ance, “ He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.”

By an act as real as the entering into physical life, he has entered into Christ’s wonderful life ; and, until this union is broken, he lives as truly and as triumphantly as Christ lives. He may anticipate a change, but not an undesirable one. He looks forward to a departure, but knows it to be from a world of toil and suffering and care to one of rest, enjoyment, and freedom. He thinks of, sings about, anticipates, crossing the river, yet is not frightened from the shore ; for his heart is with the beyond the river, and he longs to be there.

In vision, he beholds the headlands of glory in full view, and gladly spreads every inch of canvas, rounds the point, and drops anchor in the haven of eternal rest.

His is a glorious triumph over the vaunting destroyer, and the chill, damp charnel-house ; for the one opens to him the gates of bliss, while the other affords a quiet retreat for the divinely-guarded tenement of dust.

In the light of this saying let us retrospect the life, so grand and pure and good, that the divine Provider has given to the Bethel, nor permitted its transfer until the crumbling clay habitation forbade its longer stay.

Nearly sixty years ago, there drifted into the port of Boston a homeless, friendless sailor-boy, calling

himself Edward T. Taylor. Whence he came, why he was here, none knew; and perhaps none cared to know. There was nothing striking, nothing prepossessing, in his appearance. He strolled unnoticed about the city. Unnoticed? No, not altogether. One Eye, with tenderest interest, watched his movements; one gentle, kindly Hand directed his steps. God's eye was upon the lonely youth. God's hand with gentlest touch guided his way. Passing down Bromfield Street, he heard the sound of singing. His curiosity was excited; and, guided by the sound, he entered the old Methodist Church,—not, however, as every other one would do, by the door, but by the window. But let him tell it, as, in his own inimitable style, he has told it often. “I crept through the port-hole,” he says, “and stowed myself away upon the gun-deck; but a heavy broadside from the pulpit stove me to pieces, and, in a sinking condition, I hauled down my colors, and cried for quarter.” The result of this ready surrender to divine grace was the sound conversion of its subject; and the *foundation* of the *Bethel Church* was laid with appropriate ceremonies.

The homeless boy immediately became the object of tenderest sympathy and kindly regard. All unconscious of the rare treasure they had partially unearthed, the members of the Bromfield-street Church cared for his temporal wants, and got him well under weigh for the kingdom of glory.

Here was the commencement of the wonderful career of one of the most remarkable men of the present century; this the germination of the plant whose marvellous fragrance has regaled the most fastidious, and filled the earth. But nothing wonderful as yet appeared, though, evidently, the impression the sailor-convert had made upon his new-found friends was greatly to his advantage. He soon shipped in a privateer, which was captured by the enemy, and, being taken prisoner, was carried to Halifax. While here confined in prison, he is said to have preached to the inmates. On one occasion, having preached on the text, "Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king," some of his auditors were enraged, and accused him of insinuating against King George. He denied the charge, declaring that he meant "the Devil." After his liberation, and return to the States, he appears at Saugus; and here, amid gibes and scoffs and bitter persecutions, he began his public labors in the cause of his Master. It is said, that, on one occasion, a portion of his audience came to service armed with axe-helves with which to assail the preacher; and one of his brethren stood guard, and fended off the blows aimed at the sailor-preacher, while he, inspired by the occasional exclamation of his brave defender, of "Give it to them, Brother Taylor," hurled the javelins of divine truth into their midst with marvellous rapidity and precision.

Here his rare gifts,— for with him Nature had been

lavish in this regard,—his native eloquence and his unrivalled imagery, began to display themselves; and the church of his choice became somewhat apprised of its valuable acquisition.

His mode of preparation—if such it may be called—for the pulpit was characteristic. As at this time he could not read, he was dependent upon others for a knowledge of the Scriptures and the selections of his texts. He would therefore get some one to read the Bible to him, while he carefully, thoughtfully, listened. When the right text was read, he would halt the reader, and request its repetition; and having fixed it in his mind, and memorized its locality, so as to announce it to the congregation, he would give his wonderful mind to its contemplation, until heart and soul were thoroughly alive to its significance and force, and then he was ready for the pulpit: and he went into the pulpit just as the mechanic enters his shop,—to *work*; not to *put on* ministerial airs, or *assume* ministerial functions.

A poet by Nature, an artist by intuition, the inspiration of the Almighty gave him understanding; and his sermons glowed with life, beauty, and warmth.

For about four years, he labored as a local preacher under the presiding elder. It was during this time that he formed an acquaintance with that “elect lady” of Father Merrill’s eulogy at the funeral obsequies of Mother Taylor, and referred to by Rev. Mark Trafton as having been as truly “*made for Father Taylor*” as

was Eve for Adam." A truer word was never spoken.

To Deborah Millett, afterwards the loving and loved Mother Taylor, is due much of the greatness and lustre displayed by Father Taylor. That "gentle hand upon the helm" ofttimes guided the ship safely through dangerous passes, when he who "walked the quarter-deck" might have run the ship upon the rocks.

In 1819, he entered the New-England Conference as a travelling preacher, and for ten years travelled circuits along the South Shore and on Cape Cod, preaching with wonderful success, and awakening admiration of his resplendent genius wherever he went.

In 1829, he was stationed as mariners' preacher at Boston; and here began the marvellous labors which have rendered his name famous on sea and land, among the high and low, the rich and poor, the learned and illiterate.

In connection with his work here, the Boston Port Society was formed, and took station as the body-guard of the soon-to-be-renowned sailors' preacher. His regard for this society and its officers, and appreciation of their marked beneficence, need no confirmation here.

The fervid eloquence and burning zeal of this remarkable man soon aroused the interest of the people of the city; and multitudes flocked to hear the wonder of North End. Among them there appeared at

last an active, earnest Christian merchant of this city, N. A. Barrett, Esq. Greatly stirred by the eloquent appeals of the young preacher, and struck with admiration of his splendid gifts and rare pulpit power, with an enthusiasm worthy of the cause, he conceived the idea of a new church, to be built by the merchants of Boston, and used as a seamen's bethel.

He immediately called a public meeting, and announced the project. He then made an earnest appeal in its behalf, setting forth the demand for the moral elevation of seamen, and the rare qualities possessed by the occupant of Methodist Alley pulpit for such work.

The grand result was the erection of this edifice as an expression of sympathy with and appreciation of the efforts of the sailor-preacher in behalf of seamen, to whose welfare the church was to be *exclusively* devoted.

From this time, North Square was the centre of attraction; and the Seamen's Bethel, thronged with admiring crowds gathered to behold the wonderful light which flashed forth from this rare gem from the ocean, became the favorite resort of seamen and landsmen.

Though a Methodist at heart and in theology, he quickly became a favorite with the Unitarians, who were charmed with his eloquence, pleased with his marked catholicity, and delighted with his earnestness and power: among them he had many warm

friends, whose regard he cordially reciprocated. For him and his cause, they cheerfully poured forth their treasures in rich abundance, while they *respected* his *personal opinions*, and firm adherence to the faith of his own church.

On one occasion, the inquiry having come to him from a sister church, "How he could appear to fraternize with the Unitarians, he being a Methodist," he readily replied, "Among them I neither get my morals corrupted nor my religion insulted."

This reply, as intended, proved a quietus, and he was thereafter let alone.

His kindly interest in and marked devotion to seamen soon won for him the honored title of "Father;" and thenceforth the name of "Father Taylor" became his universally-recognized appellation. Thus he who had never known a father's care became a father to all.

In his hands, truth seemed to glow with a divine light, and was pressed home with such force as to overwhelm with pungent conviction. Thus, in preaching upon the parable of the marriage of the king's son, he dwelt upon the unhappy condition of the guest who was without the wedding-garment: so graphic and forcible was his description, that a poor sailor just in from sea, having neither coat nor vest on, arose in the congregation, in the midst of his sermon, and, with deep emotion and a stammering tongue, apologized for having appeared in church in

such array. “But,” said the poor man, with tears coursing down his weather-beaten cheeks, “these are all I have.” — “Sit down, shipmate,” said the old man: “you are all right, and we’ll care for you by and by.”

Father Taylor was not a learned man; but so wonderfully gifted was he, that scholars and statesmen have sat at his feet, and from him received instruction. He never carolled song, nor sat at easel; yet poets and artists have received inspiration from him as they have hung upon his lips. While thus the great and mighty have become greater and mightier through his labors, the lowly and uncultured have also shared the feast his rich store has furnished; for emphatically through him the poor had the gospel preached unto them.

While he respected and deferred to human greatness, he never despised nor neglected the lowly. It was no disrespect in him, that led him to demand that the honored among men should relinquish the seat selected and occupied in the Bethel, that the unhonored occupant of the forecastle might possess it, but a just regard for the rights of those for whom the Bethel had been erected. Hence a governor must stand aside, that Jack might take his privileged place.

No man was more ready than he to reciprocate attention, whether received from the higher or the lower grades of social order. He would remove his hat, and bow as low, to a common sailor as to the highest State functionary.

Did he enjoy a visit at the palatial mansion of an up-town resident, no less was he delighted to enter the humble home of the poorest among his people. Indeed, to none who were worthy did he shut the door of his affections and sympathies, or refuse the hand of true fellowship.

He was a wonderful man. With an intellect whose native strength placed him in the front rank of the cultured great men, with a force of expression in which he stood alone unrivalled among his peers, with a marvellous tact and address that brought his audience to his feet, and made him master of the situation, he has achieved a renown whose glory eternity will fail to dim.

In Father Taylor's life, we have an exhibition of the glorious triumphs of grace.

Untaught, uncultured,—as far as the schools are concerned,—he was a proficient in the school of Christ. Here he graduated, and with honors.

The “broadside” of Bishop Hedding, from the pulpit of the Bromfield-street Church was the grand liberator of his remarkable mind from the earthly fetters which, doubtless, would have bound him to the ordinary circles of society.

Nature did much for him; but grace has done more. It brought him out, and made him shine resplendent with a lustre which no mere earthly brightness could rival.

It gave him home, friends, position, power, and in-

timate communion with Him whose mighty arm was his reliance, and whose inspiration carried him out of and beyond himself; revealing to him things unutterable to ordinary mortals.

Next to his conversion, his veneration for the Bible largely contributed to his greatness. Father Taylor was anchored to the Bible; and *his anchor never dragged.*

You have heard him, in strains impassioned, graphically portray its excellencies; you have seen him press it to his bosom with affection glowing in every lineament of his speaking countenance; you have heard him, with biting sarcasm, satirize, as only Father Taylor could do, the paltry efforts of its defamers to destroy its power.

He prized the Bible; he loved it; he venerated it. To him it was indeed a book most sacred. As to creeds, and forms of faith, though, in the fundamentals, true to his church, yet he was not at all rigid, and sometimes even questioned as to their force and foundation.

But the Bible, the old chart, and its claim upon us as to faith and conduct as a divinely-given revelation of God's will to man, he never for a moment questioned. It was to him the voice of God speaking by prophets and apostles; and upon it he built his hopes for time and eternity.

He loved the gospel when preached in its purity and power. A better, more interested, more appre-

ciative, more flattering listener to preaching, I have never known, nor could I wish. As I have known him, it scarcely seems possible that he ever sat as critic upon the gospel. He was sometimes severe upon the opinions of men as expressed in the pulpit, and was occasionally rather caustic upon the manner of speakers in the pulpit; but when the pure, fresh gospel was presented, he fed upon it, and was delighted with it. His earnest "That's it," "Now you've got them," "Give it to them;" his rapid changes of expression as he followed the discourse, and sympathized therewith; and his affectionate "Well done, my child: God bless you!" — rendered him a very interesting and pleasing companion in the pulpit. Sometimes his ludicrous expressions were rather a severe draft upon self-possession, as with a single significant remark he would lay out the imaginary antagonists of the speaker.

His antagonism to the Devil,— for, though he did not believe *in* the Devil, he fully believed *about* him,— his hatred of sin, his love for God's word, his attachment to Christ, and devotion to his cause, his admiration for purity, his marked respect for the true Christian soldier, his regard for the Church, and his living faith in the resurrection and final triumph of the Christian over death, hell, and the grave, were always apparent.

The glorious gospel he had so long and so eloquently preached, he loved to hear; and he received it with gladness of heart.

The great theme of his meditations and his conversations was salvation through faith in Christ. Upon this he could be aroused when no other subject could recall to consciousness; nor did he ever appear wearied therewith.

His fellowship with Christ and his Church was significantly indicated by his frequent exclamation of "The Lord Jesus and the brethren." With them in his days of activity, he was with them still, and hoped to live and reign with them forever.

Gleams of consciousness flashed through the mental gloom, that, like the shades of night, gathered about him; and, even in his unconsciousness, there was apparent significance. Thus, a short time before his final break-down, passing across the room before the mirror, he discovered therein an old, feeble, tottering, gray-haired man; and his interest and sympathy were at once excited. With a polite bow, he thus addressed him, "Sir, you are old and feeble, you need salvation: come to Christ, he will save you;" and, with an inviting smile and an earnest beckon with the hand, he continued to plead with the old man that he would come to Christ and be saved. At last, becoming exhausted with the effort, he sank into a chair, and sadly exclaimed, "The old man don't know enough to be saved."

The next day he made the same discovery; and, at once recognizing the old man, saluted him, and renewed the appeal of the day before. "You are al-

most gone," said he: "you have but a few days more to live. Come to Christ. He will receive and save you. Come now: you'll soon be gone." And, as on the day previous, he continued earnestly and affectionately to persuade the old man to seek the Saviour, until exhaustion forced him into a chair; and then, turning away from the mirror, he exclaimed with considerable energy of expression, "He is an old *infidel*: he won't have salvation at *any* price." Here was the old preacher of the gospel true to himself and the gospel to the last.

On the sabbath preceding his departure, while being dressed by his attendant, he wailed forth a sad complaint respecting his helplessness, in these words, "Oh, dear! I don't know any thing."

"But," said Brother Bridgett, "you know Jesus?"

"Yes, yes," he quickly replied with a significant movement.

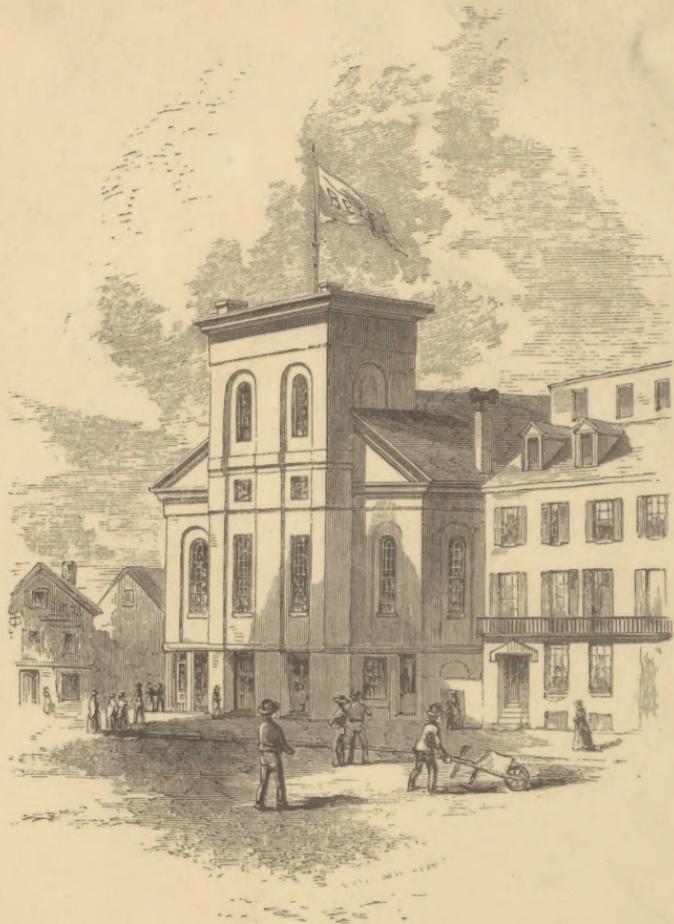
"Is he precious?" inquired Brother Bridgett.

"*Certainly*," he exclaimed, with an intonation expressive of surprise that there was any occasion for such a question.

This was the last of his conscious sayings; and on the early morning of the 5th of April, on the ebb of the tide, after a protracted physical contest with the destroyer, he quietly left the field of human struggles, and entered the invisible. Like the brave old veteran he was, he stoutly contested the ground with the usurper, inch by inch, so long as the shaky tenement afforded him a battle-field.

Brethren, he told us often, and with emphasis, that he was not going to die. Nor has he died. Driven by a superior force from the field where he has waged glorious war with sin and Satan, he has only retired to await the final overthrow of the enemy. And when the last enemy shall have bit the dust, and the victims of his merciless reign shall come forth to life and beauty, we shall again see the loved form of Father Taylor, with a glow of holy triumph suffusing his transfigured countenance, as with majestic tread, with his loved consort by his side, at the head of a little multitude of his redeemed sailor-boys, take position among the glorified, and, with shout and song, enter the gates of the celestial city.

“ Oh, how sweet it will be,
In that beautiful land,
So free from all sorrow and pain,
With songs on our lips,
And with harps in our hands,
To greet one another again ! ”



THE SEAMEN'S BETHEL.

ERECTED BY THE BOSTON PORT SOCIETY, 1833.